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SUBJECT: RWANDAN CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS MEET WITH AMBASSADOR

REF: A. KIGALI 183

[1](#)B. KIGALI 219

This is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: During a May 24 meeting with prominent local civil society leaders, Ambassador expressed U.S. support of the role of civil society in Rwanda, stressing the critical balance it brings to government decision-making. Civil society leaders discussed their goals, successes, and interactions among themselves and with government. They indicated that relations with the government have generally improved and they have been consulted on new draft legislation concerning NGOs, although their views are not always taken into account. They are seeking to coordinate their activities to strengthen their collective efforts. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) On May 24, Ambassador, accompanied by members of a U.S. delegation visiting Rwanda for a Tripartite Plus meeting, met with four prominent civil society leaders to discuss the work of their organizations and the state of civil and human rights in Rwanda. Ambassador expressed the Embassy's support for the role of civil society in Rwanda, which brings critical balance to government decision-making. The U.S. recognizes the important role of civil society, he said, and encourages the GOR to recognize this legitimate role. He noted that while the U.S. can provide some financial assistance, the critical work must be undertaken by Rwandans. Following are brief descriptions of the four civil society organizations.

#### Background

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[1](#)3. (U) Haguruka ("stand up" in the Kinyarwanda language) was established in 1991 to promote and defend women's and children's rights. It provides community-based training on human rights, with special focus on women's and children's rights. It also provides simplified explanations of legislation, such as the laws on succession and protection of children against violence, through mass media, and legal advice and advocacy assistance. During the past five years, Haguruka has succeeded in restoring the rights, including compensation in some cases, of more than 10,000 women and children. Haguruka has also been involved in the promotion of land rights and adoption of laws on domestic violence and protection of children against violence.

[1](#)4. (U) LIPRODHOR (Rwandan League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights) was established in 1991 to focus on human rights protection and awareness. The nationwide organization currently has an estimated 600 members. It conducts field investigations of suspected human rights

abuses, publishes reports, and discusses its findings with the GOR and the National Human Rights Commission. In politically sensitive cases, LIPRODHOR collaborates with other organizations to put more pressure on the government. It is conducting follow-up of gacaca proceedings to address concerns that have been raised, and has been successful in obtaining dismissal of some cases of false accusations. It publishes a newsletter that explains new legislation, produces a weekly radio program, and maintains a website.

¶15. (U) AJPRODHO (Youth Organization for the Promotion of Human Rights and Development) was founded in 1997 by students at the National University of Rwanda in Butare to "enlighten youth about their responsibility to protect human rights." It has established human rights clubs in primary and secondary schools to instill core human rights values, and provides legal advice and advocacy. AJPRODHO and Haguruka jointly lobbied parliament to enact legislation to provide legal representation to vulnerable groups in Rwandan society. AJPRODHO is working to mobilize civil society groups to "speak with one voice" to maximize their influence, and is urging policymakers to incorporate human rights and justice issues in the national growth and poverty reduction strategy paper.

¶16. (U) LDGL (Human Rights League in the Great Lakes Region) is a regional human rights organization based in Kigali with chapters in neighboring Burundi and DRC. Its activities include observing local elections and monitoring human rights violations in collaboration with local organizations and other partners. LDGL advocacy initiatives are aimed at promoting good governance and freedom of expression and press in collaboration with the media, diplomatic community, and international organizations.

#### GOR Interaction with Civil Society

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¶17. (U) When asked about the interaction between the GOR and civil society, LDGL Executive Secretary Francine Rutazana characterized the government's attitude toward civil society as gradually improved as far as "the government has become aware of the presence of an increasingly important civil society." During the February local elections (ref A), LDGL deployed 30 observers who reported some irregularities. According to Rutazana, the presence of observers during the elections was a signal to the GOR that there were people watching government actions.

¶18. (SBU) Rutazana pointed out that the major problem in the relationship between the GOR and civil society on politically motivated decisions, such as the recent decentralization and the 2003 provisional release of genocidaires, is that the GOR is reluctant to consult civil society. She noted that this problem exists at the national as well as local government levels, from top to bottom. She was hopeful, however, that increasingly professional and experienced civil society groups would have a positive impact on government decision-making.

¶19. (SBU) Haguruka Executive Secretary Christine Tuyisenge commented that the issue of whether the GOR is attempting to control civil society has been a subject of debate since 2002 when the GOR first recognized civil society as a crucial partner. She pointed out that civil society groups are required by law to register each year and to provide reports on their activities to the Ministry of Local Government. She observed, however, increasing collaboration between civil society and the GOR, particularly on poverty reduction and proposed legislation. She noted that a women's umbrella organization (Profemmes Twese Hamwe) is playing a lead role in the reformulation of the law on non-profit organizations.

¶10. (SBU) AJPRODHO President Ronald Nkusi acknowledged that Rwandan civil society groups have not been very assertive in engaging the GOR. He pointed out that the GOR is using "trickier" strategies than before in dealing with civil society. The GOR requires NGOs to obtain authorization from

the GOR for some projects, depending on the nature of the project, before they can access funds provided by their international partners. (Note: LIPRODHOR, for example, was required to obtain authorization from the Ministry of Finance to access funds for an EU-funded project. End note). According to Nkusi, this may generate further government restrictions on local organizations' access to international donor funds.

#### Proposed NGO Bill

¶11. (U) Haguruka's Tuyisenge indicated that consultations between the GOR and civil society on a proposed NGO bill were positive but that civil society's recommendations have not been incorporated into the draft legislation. (Note: Most recently, the Ministry of Local Government accepted most of the recommendations proposed by NGOs on the latest draft, which will soon go to the cabinet for a vote. End note.)

¶12. (U) LDGL's Rutazana explained that the NGO "Profemmes," rather than the civil society platform, is taking the lead role on the pending NGO legislation because civil society groups prefer to use informal consultation mechanisms for specific issues and to resort to the civil society platform as part of formal consultations with the government on broad issues.

#### Gacaca

¶13. (SBU) LIPRODHOR Executive Secretary Jean Paul Turinzwenamungu observed that a major problem with gacaca is interference by government officials at all levels of the process, which has a negative impact on the independence of gacaca judges. He also noted lack of sufficient security for witnesses and gaps in the legislation, such as ill-defined provisions concerning contempt of court, which lead to abuses in interpretation. He pointed out that there are unresolved cases of accusations based on personal agendas and judges' biases and that the gacaca law, which provides for only one level of appeal, does not provide sufficient guarantee of fair and impartial justice.

¶14. (U) LDGL's Rutazana pointed out that the National Service of Gacaca Jurisdictions does not have legal authority to change the venue of gacaca proceedings, but that its role is nevertheless important in resolving cases of arbitrary arrest and detention.

#### Parliamentary Report on Genocide Ideology

¶15. (SBU) According to LIPRODHOR's Turinzwenamungu, the 2004 parliamentary report on genocide ideology recommended the dissolution of several organizations. The GOR, however, did not take action on the recommendations. Following publication of the report, many civil society leaders criticized the methodology used by the parliament in producing its report because it did not interview or consult with those named. He also commented that the report did not provide a clear definition of "genocide ideology," a term subsequently liberally applied to civil society members viewed by the regime as political opponents.

¶16. (SBU) LDGL's Rutazana added that the parliamentary report was published shortly after the 2003 presidential and parliamentary elections, during which the term "genocide ideology" had been used to undermine certain candidates for political purposes. Rutazana believed that the intent of the report was to discredit and neutralize political opposition.

¶17. (SBU) AJPRODHO's Nkusi pointed out that while the GOR has not acted on the report, some organizations are "still shaken" and the report has had a lingering impact in undermining the credibility of civil society. He noted that under the pretext of enforcing the prohibition against "genocide ideology," the government suppressed organizations that were critical of the government. He asserted that

while some individual members of LIPRODHOR may have been involved in genocide ideology, it was unfair of parliament to label the group as a whole as a genocide ideologist. He suggested that one way to avoid the abuse of accusations of genocide ideology in domestic politics would be to clarify the law.

¶18. (SBU) Nkusi noted that while relations between the GOR and civil society remain difficult on politically sensitive issues, he was optimistic that the situation is improving, particularly on less sensitive issues, such as economic development and judicial reform.

Comment

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¶19. (SBU) Despite charges of GOR intolerance of criticism and the lingering effect of the 2004 parliamentary report on civil society groups, ongoing activism of these groups suggests that the government not only tolerates, but in some cases is even receptive to, criticism of its policies. President Kagame has challenged government officials to closely monitor government operations and to be self-critical (ref B); civil society groups provide the critical additional balance to government actions. Although seemingly cautious of pressing the government too hard and somewhat tentative in engaging the GOR, they have achieved successes that provide grounds for optimism that they will continue to develop into effective public policy advocates through their collective efforts, as evidenced most recently by their successful participation in consultations with the government on the draft law on international NGOs.  
THURSTON